

SPIRITUAL VISION IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

I. INTRODUCTION

Good Morning. Thank you Mark for that Opening Prayer and gracious welcome. Let me add my own Welcome to the on line worship service of Redland Baptist Church for Sunday March 29, 2020. My name is Bob Michael. I am a long time member of the very special place known as Redand Baptist Church. I have the privilege of bringing today's sermon message.

The title of this sermon is: SPIRITUAL VISION IN TIMES OF TROUBLE. Our study subject for this discussion is the great Old Testament figure-Caleb.

I want to begin my time with you with a little test. The instructions on how to complete the test will appear at the beginning of the video. Watch with me and remember to carefully follow the instructions:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB_ITKZm1Ts

This type of test is known to Psychologists as an "awareness test." This particular video was made as part of a bicycle safety campaign in England. Alright, so how did you do on the test? Did you count the 13 passes? More importantly, did you see the moon walking Bear pass through the middle of the group? If you missed the Bear, you are not alone. Similar studies show that roughly 50% of the

participants in these types of studies completely fail to see the moonwalking bear.

Why did 50% of the people completely miss the presence of the Bear? Because their focus was on what they thought was important-how many times someone dressed in white passed the ball. They missed something very unique because they failed to see the “big picture.” Caleb is a wonderful example of a man who saw the big picture of God’s fulfillment of a centuries old promise of a land set apart for the Nation of Israel.

II. BACKGROUND

Travel back with me in time. Caleb lived in a very interesting and turbulent time in the history of Israel. We find information about Caleb in the Old Testament Book of Numbers, the Fourth Book in the Bible; and in the Book of Joshua, the Sixth Book in the Bible.

Beginning with the Book of Exodus, the dominate central giant figure in the Bible is Moses. For Forty years under God’s direction, Moses is the key mediator and deliverer of the Israelite people. He is a unique leader-probably the most respected and revered figure in the Old Testament. Listen to what the Bible tells us about Moses during this period:

- he speaks face to face with God;**
- he speaks with God “as a man speaks to his friend”;**
- he is God’s spokesman to warn Pharaoh of the wrath of God that will be the ten plagues;**

- he saves the firstborn child of every Israelite parent by directing the painting of the lambs blood on every door threshold;**
- he leads the nation of Israel, by most estimates 4-6 million people-strong, out of Egyptian bondage;**
- he parts the Red Sea and saves the nation of Israel,**
- he causes the Red Sea to swallow the entire army of Pharaoh the most powerful military force of the day;**
- he leads the people into the desert where he oversees food and water during the next forty years;**
- he goes up on Mt. Sinai amidst the thunder and fire and returns with the Ten Commandments;**
- he authors the Pentateuch, the first 5 Books of the Bible.**

These examples are only a few of the many great things Moses did on behalf of the people. Moses as a leader of the people was always there, always dependable, always saving the people from themselves. Life without Moses must have been unimaginable to the Nation of Israel. But all this ends in the second verse of the Book of Joshua when God makes clear an important transition is about to occur when He speaks to Joshua:

“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all the people ...”. (Joshua 1:1-2).

Henceforth, the Israelite people will no longer be a Moses centric entity. He is gone. Now, they will have to rely on the written word God has provided and become a nation of laws governed by the Ten Commandments and the 300 “Thou Shall’s” and the 300 “Thou Shall Not” laws established in the

Valley of Decision between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim as the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land just before Moses died.

It is also at this same time that the plan and the promise first announced to Abraham centuries before will also finally begin:

“I will give to you and to your offspring after you, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession and I will be their God.” (Genesis 17:8).

This promise from God as to the Land of Canaan was the purpose for which God had led them out of captivity in Egypt. It was what they had spent 40 years in the desert anticipating.

Joshua as the successor to Moses, is the central human actor in the conquest of Canaan. Standing by his side is Caleb.

To properly frame the importance of Caleb, it is important to note that of the 4-6 Million or so Israelite people who historians calculate left Egypt forty years earlier, only Joshua and Caleb ever step foot on the promised land of Canaan. Caleb and Joshua at the time the Israelites enter Canaan are the two oldest people left in the nation. Theirs is a unique record of faithful devotion and service to the Lord. Along with Joshua, Caleb’s spiritual vision in times of trouble sets him apart from all of the remainder of the Nation of Israel so that God makes Caleb a special promise that is finally fulfilled by a specific grant of land that no other Israelite receives.

But before we get to this magnificent part of Caleb's story, "Let's" as Paul Harvey used to say "Look at the rest of the story."

The nation of Israel under Moses guidance has arrived at Kadesh (KAY-dehsh)-Barnea. As you can see from this map, Kadesh-Barnea is to the South and at the very edge of the Land of Canaan and it is from this strategic point that Moses will send the 12 spies to scout the Promised Land.



The year before they arrived at Kadesh-Barnea had been marked by unbelief, discontent, grumbling, complaining and a yearning of the Israelites with their new "rose colored glasses" looking back wistfully for what they had left behind in Egypt.

They had forgotten the cruel burden of slavery and recalled glowingly the relative stability, certainty and predictability of their lives in Egypt.

The story of the spies mission and what happens when they return with their report is set forth in the Book of Numbers Chapters 13 and 14. Let's read the relevant verses. Because I am going to move around a bit reading God's word, let's just stop here in advance and observe as we read from the Bible that This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Now to the story of the spies...

Numbers 13 Exploring Canaan

13 The Lord said to Moses, 2 "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."3 So at the Lord's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. 4 These are their names:

... 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;

Caleb was one of the original 12 spies that Moses sends into Canaan. Each of these 12 spies is assigned a separate area of Canaan to examine up close and the area that Caleb explored was a hilly, mountainous region called Hebron. The name may be familiar to you because Hebron was, and still is, a place of great historical importance to the Hebrew people. You see, Hebron was where Abraham had lived when he first came to the Promised Land from Haran generations earlier. It was

there that he built an altar of sacrifice. It was there that God communicated most of the covenant with Abraham. Hebron was where God promised Abraham the Promised Land in the first place. It was where He said that he would be the father of a great nation and that a Messiah would one day come. Hebron is also where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were buried-so it was and still is a very important piece of real estate in the Hebrew world.

Another thing I want you to note is that Caleb was not a Jew. Caleb the spy is the son of Jephunneh. Jephunneh is identified as a Kenizzite in Numbers 32:12 and Joshua 14:6,14. The Kennizzites were not part of the Hebrew nation. So Caleb was a foreigner. We don't know how Caleb came to be in Egypt enslaved along with the Jewish people but we do have a clue in his name. You see "Caleb" in Hebrew means "dog." To call someone a "dog" in Old Testament times was a great insult. Dogs were of no value in that culture, so this name hints at the fact that Caleb was of no value to his parents. It tells us he might have been abandoned, maybe even an unwanted child. Perhaps he had been captured or even sold into slavery and that's how he came to Egypt. But in spite of this by the providence of God Caleb was folded into the family of God. And not only that, he was placed in the tribe of Judah, which means he became a member of the Jewish aristocracy because from Judah came the kings and the great spiritual, political, and military leaders of the nation.

So the spies are sent out into the Land of Canaan. Caleb is about 40 years of age at this point. Moses gives the spies very specific instructions recorded in the Book of Numbers Chapter

13: versus 17-20 where each of them is instructed to explore specific parts of the land in Canaan and report back specific information:

- what is the land like?**
- are the people there weak or strong; few or many?**
- do the cities have walls or are they protected?**
- is the soil fertile or poor?**
- are there many trees?**
- bring back some samples of the crops you see**

So after 40 days of exploration, the spies return to give their “Scouting report” which is set forth in the Book of Numbers in Chapter 13 versus 25-33:

25 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

As a historical note, the reference to the “Nephilim” is a reference to a race of people that were exceptionally large. David would later face one of their descendants whose name was Goliath.

Now back to the scouting report: We know from other verses that Joshua and Caleb are both of the same mind and opposed to the view of all of the other ten spies. But it is Caleb the Bible quotes who stands up and “quiets the people!” and says without any reservation:

30 “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it!”

So the Israelites are offered two very different visions: one is a vision of the 10 spies that conquering the Land of Canaan is an impossible task with obstacles that just cannot be overcome. The other is a vision that ignores and doesn’t even address the obstacles laid before the people and says in essence, “I don’t care about the obstacles, we can do it!”

I understand the position of the ten spies. The Israelites are outnumbered; they are smaller and weaker in stature, they have less swords, shields, spears; they have no fortifications to fight behind; they have no reliable sources of support for a fight in the form of food and water; they had no standing army trained and ready for battle. This is the human vision of the spies, this is what the spies saw and they were right. But what Caleb saw was not based on his human vision but instead his spiritual vision: this was not just an ordinary piece of land, this was the land God promised in a covenant with Abraham and He had directed the Israelites to enter the land and take it!

The difference in the two visions is clearly set forth in the verses that follow where the reaction of the people to the report is recorded in **Numbers 14 verses 1-4.**

1 That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! 3 Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Joshua and Caleb in response say to the people as recorded in verses 7-9:

“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

The reaction of the people in hearing this is astonishing: they all began to talk about stoning to death both Joshua and Caleb. In response to their unfaithfulness, God appears among the Israelites and threatens to destroy all of them with a plague. Moses once again along with Aaron intercedes on the Nation of Israel’s behalf and begs for forgiveness. God responds by granting a partial pardon but directing that none of the Israelites of that generation over the age of 20 shall ever set foot on the promised land except Joshua and Caleb. And as to Caleb, God says: But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

Now we need to fast forward another 45 years. Caleb has spent this time in the wilderness in the presence of the rebellious people who were kept from entering the Promised Land because of their unbelief. Their eyes were on the giants, Caleb’s eyes were on the Lord. Caleb treasured the word of the Lord. He treasured the promise of the Lord and knew it would be fulfilled no matter what the obstacles. He kept his faith fresh and alive. And now the Israelites have entered the land and driven out most of the inhabitants and conquered the

land with God directing Joshua at every important turn. Joshua and the Hebrew people have fought for several years now in their conquest of the promised land. Our text takes place in a time when the land of Canaan is finally pretty much under the control of the people of Israel. There are still enemies to deal with but most of them are held at bay. Finally comes the day, when Joshua stands before the tribes to divide the land among the tribes.

As the assembled Tribes stand waiting to hear how Joshua will divide the land, Caleb steps forward and says as recorded in the Book of Joshua in Chapter 14:6-12

6“You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, 8 but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. 9 So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.’

10 “Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. 12 Now give me this hill country

that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.”

Wow, what a man! Eighty-five years old and just as vigorous as he was 45 years earlier and spoiling for the fight he knows lays ahead of him! What was his secret? Obviously, it is Caleb’s wholehearted belief in God’s word. He knows there are still pockets of the giants left in Hebron that will have to be conquered. It didn’t bother him 45 years earlier and it doesn’t bother him now. This is his inheritance, it is the land that the Lord promised him.

What is it that Caleb had that made him so different? Caleb had spiritual vision. This is a vision that means being able to see a situation from God’s perspective, not man’s perspective. It is a vision that let’s the seer go forward in a situation confident that God’s purposes and promises will be fulfilled. It is a vision that trusts in God and knows that His promise and word will be fulfilled. It means trusting in an invisible God whose strength and sovereignty will allow you to accomplish things that no one else can even imagine possible. This power of spiritual vision was key to Caleb’s ability to look at a situation in a time of trouble and see things with spiritual eyes. Like Caleb, we now are in a time of trouble and need to see things with a spiritual vision through spiritual eyes.

I think there are three important things about Caleb’s spiritual vision that provide a model for us.

The first characteristic of true spiritual vision exemplified by Caleb is realism. Vision is not pretending things are other than as they are. Vision is not trying to attribute to God what he has not said or committed to do. Vision is not seeing in my own mind what I would like and then praying and believing hard enough to try to make it happen.

Spiritual vision starts with a heart where Biblical thinking is in control of our personality and choices. Caleb kept God and His promises central to everything he said and did. That consistent centeredness on God kept Caleb constant when everyone around him was losing their way and turning aside in an appalling faithlessness. The ten spies would clearly defend themselves by claiming they were only being realistic but their hearts were not fixed like Caleb's on God. They saw with human eyes but a faithlessness which distorted their perspective. Caleb was the realist, he saw the same challenges as the others and never disputed their observations of the challenges. But unlike the 10 spies, he saw the challenges through the lens of faith in the unmistakable promises of God as compared to the threat of the giants which Caleb reckoned as nothing.

A second aspect of Caleb's vision is his humility. True humility is a rare virtue. True humility recognizes the greatness of God's wisdom where the believer thinks and acts in submission to God's laws even though he or she desperately want to do something different. The response to our faith and obedience is God's grace and favor. To do otherwise, is to be arrogant. And arrogance is a great enemy of the believer.

The third and most important element of Caleb's spiritual vision is his faith. There is no shadow of doubt in Caleb's assertions. At first, he says in essence "this land is already ours, the Lord gave it to us, what are we waiting for, let us go forth and claim it." 45 years later, he steps up and says to Joshua, "you remember what the Lord said about us and you remember what the Lord promised through Moses, now give me that land and I will go forward and conquer it." And by the way, Caleb did just that. This vigorous octogenarian would later drive out three pockets of the descendants of the same giants that made Caleb's contemporaries feel like grasshoppers and tremble in fear.

Faith is the antidote to fear. Remember this. Particularly now in our time of trouble. Faith is holding onto a God who is faithful to His word and His promises. In Isaiah, 400 years before Jesus, God reassured His believers:

**Do not be afraid—I am with you!
I am your God—let nothing terrify you!
Isaiah 41:10**

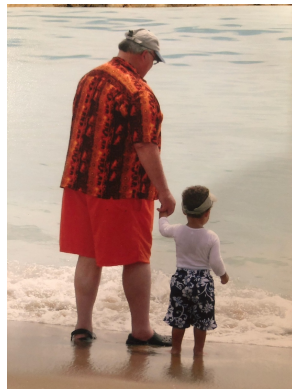
Jesus gave us the same reassurance in John 14 verse 1:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me." John 14:1

And again in John 16 verse 33:

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

The essence of faith is holding onto these promises. Our grip may sometimes be very weak; Jesus described faith as sometimes “like a grain of mustard seed.” I have 7 grandchildren. Despite Mark’s claim to the contrary as to his own grandchildren, mine are clearly the greatest 7 grandchildren that ever lived. They all love the beach. I have many times walked with them on the beach right where the waves hit the shore. “Hold onto Grandpa’s hand” I would tell them.



Here is a picture of a two year old Carter (who is now almost 15) holding my hand at the edge of the surf. He looks tiny next to the hulking figure beside him. I know he trusted me to keep him safe from the water since he could not yet swim. So because I love him, I tell him to hold onto my hand. But I held his then little hand a hundred times more firmly than his little hand held mine. His safety and delight in the water, like all of my grandchildren to follow, depended on my grip, not his own. This was the secret of Caleb’s spiritual vision; faith in a power much greater than his own.

This is the secret to the spiritual vision and faith that all of us need. We need to learn to cling to God’s word and His

promises for us just like Caleb. We need to feel the 100 fold grip of God on our lives just like Carter felt my grip that day on the beach.

There is little question that we live now in a time of chaos, fear, and worry. There is virtually no part of our existence that is not touched by this Corona virus. Some have suggested that it is God's judgement on an unfaithful and sinful people. I don't know whether this is correct or not. As I understand it, Jesus already paid my debt for sin and my sin in God's eyes is as far from me as the East is from the West because of my belief in Jesus Christ. Likewise, it does not seem to me that it is consistent with God's character that He would punish the just along with the unjust.

So let's focus our spiritual vision and see what can be seen. How should we see this time of trouble? I saw some interesting tips on the Internet that I will share with you:

Tip # 1: First and foremost, we can trust that God is in control. I have literally said this to myself every day for several weeks as I watch 50 years of work, saving and discipline seemingly disappear as the Stock Market continues to collapse. Maybe this is a time to remind all of us that when life feels out of control, it may simply be a reminder from God that life was never in our control in the first place.

Colossians 1:16-17 says,

“All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Revelation 21 verse 6 says,

God is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”

Please know that God is bigger than the coronavirus and that he has good plans for you and me in these times.

Tip # 2: In this era of social distancing and forced time on our hands away from the normal daily distractions, I wanted to suggest some things for how to invest your time and strengthen your relationship with God. Time is an interesting thing – it can be so easy for us to get so busy. But in these days of social distancing, you may have more time on your hands than you know what to do with. So here are some tips:

1. Read the Bible. Better yet, read it with your whole family including those school aged children who right now are driving you out of your mind and eating you out of house and home. This might be a great time to get into the habit of reading God’s word on a daily basis. If you’re wondering where to start, I often recommend the Book of John for a beginning Bible study.

2. Read a book. Perhaps now is the time to get to that spiritual book you’ve been thinking about reading.

3. Phone a friend (or family member). While gathering with people may be more difficult, this could be a very good time to reach out by phone. Perhaps you can call that person you haven’t reached out to in awhile. Perhaps you can think about someone who lives alone. As you talk on the phone, don’t be afraid to discuss spiritual topics. Ask good questions and listen. Reassure them about God being in control.

4. Continue to join with the members of Redland Baptist Church in our online worship service. And when this is all over, come worship with us in person. I guarantee you will not find a better Pastor and Pastoral team than here at Redland Baptist Church. I also guarantee you will not find a better group of believers to study and fellowship with than here at Redland Baptist Church.

5. And finally, Pray. Pray for your family, our leaders and your Nation. Please know that you can talk with God. You can worship him, pour out your soul to him, ask him questions and ask him for help in your time of need.

Use this time to grow closer to God. May we all take comfort in knowing that God loves us and, through faith in His son, Jesus Christ, we can be with Him forever! Amen and Amen.

Thank you for being with us.

